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UNCLAS ROME 001174

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR OES/OMC - STETSON TINKHAM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EFIS](#) [SENV](#) [KSCA](#) [ETRD](#) [AG](#) [FR](#) [IT](#) [MO](#) [TU](#) [ICCAT](#)

SUBJECT: DRIFTNETS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: WORLD

WILDLIFE FUND MEDITERRANEAN OFFICE PROPOSAL FOR ACTION

REFS: (A) State 031564, (B) Signoretti-Tinkham e-mails

(U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (U) This is an action request: please see paragraphs 8 and 9.

2. (SBU) Embassy recently received a letter from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Mediterranean Programme Office in Rome that alleged illegal driftnet activity by Morocco, Algeria, France, Italy and Turkey in the Mediterranean high seas. Citing a 2003 WWF study of the problem in Morocco, and more recent evidence from 2004 and 2005, WWF proposes a plan to end these illegal and harmful practices. Excerpts from WWF's letter are provided below. The letter in its entirety has been faxed to OES/OMC for Stetson Tinkham.

BEGIN EXCERPTS OF WWF LETTER:

3. (SBU)...IUU (illegal, unreported and unregulated) driftnet-related activity currently exists in at least Morocco, Algeria, France and Italy; and Turkey, Morocco, Algeria and Turkey have openly reported to ICCAT (The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas) the use of driftnets recently. A study carried out by WWF and the local organization AZIR (acronym not spelled out) in 2003, published in the prestigious scientific journal "Biological Conservation," pointed out the extreme environmental impact of the large-scale driftnet fleet based in Northern Morocco that operates in the Mediterranean High Seas targeting swordfish. A minimum 177 active driftnetters using nets of up to 14 kilometers in length could be recorded, mainly based in the ports of Tangiers (130 units), Al Hoceima (28 units) and Nador (19 units). This fleet annually kills more than ten percent of the short-beaked common dolphin population in the Alboran Sea (SW Mediterranean), the last Mediterranean refuge for this cetacean, which is listed as endangered in the IUCN (The World Conservation Union) Red List. Besides the 3,500 dolphins killed annually as by-catch in Mediterranean waters, this illegal, unreported and unregulated fleet inflicts a high mortality on vulnerable pelagic sharks (25,000 individuals belonging to three species; a swordfish to shark ratio of 2:1). By-catch by the Tangiers fleet in the adjacent Atlantic waters and Strait of Gibraltar would include a further 13,000 dolphins and 77,000 sharks.

4. (SBU) Even if the Moroccan delegation to the 2004 ICCAT meeting orally communicated their plans to implement a four-year phase out plan for the affected driftnet fleet, WWF has reasons to doubt its real implementation under the current situation. Indeed, in a meeting in May 2004 in Rabat, the Secretary General of the Ministry for Marine Fisheries, Mr. Tijani Rhanmi, clearly stated to a WWF/AZIR delegation that no phase-out plan for the fleet would ever be implemented unless funding assistance is made available by donor states. Recently, on 15th March 2005, the Spanish Congress asked the Spanish Government to ask the European Commission to include the phase-out of the Moroccan driftnet fleet as a precondition for the signature of any new fishing agreement with this country.

5. (SBU) Considering these antecedents, and given the obvious need for a regional approach, WWF outlines below ... actions to solve this longstanding problem that undermines the credibility of the international governance of the seas:

MOROCCO:

-- Support the Moroccan government's search for financial resources to enable ... a real phase-out plan for its whole IUU driftnet fleet. This would encompass the coast ranging from Larache, in the Atlantic, to Nador, in the Alboran Sea, including the port of Tangiers, which concentrates the bulk of this illegal fleet.

-- WWF is ready to contribute proactively with its expertise, in the role of an environmental auditor of this process.

ALGERIA:

-- Recommending to the Algerian government to carry out an accurate survey of current driftnet activities in the country.

-- As a second step, a phase-out plan should be encouraged, supported with necessary funding, similar to the Moroccan case.

TURKEY:

-- Recommending to the Turkish government to carry out an accurate survey of current driftnet activities in the country. Some information is already available in academic publications.

-- As a second step, a phase-out plan should be encouraged, supported with necessary funding, similar to the Moroccan and Algerian cases.

FRANCE:

-- Recommending to the French government the need to develop and implement a phase-out plan for the IUU "thonaille" or "correntine" driftnet fleet operating in the NW Mediterranean, including the waters protected under the Cetaceans Sanctuary.

ITALY:

-- Recommending to the Italian government to increase control and surveillance activities to prevent the illegal activity of driftnetters, particularly from Sardinian ports.

END EXCERPTS FROM TEXT.

COMMENT:

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16. (SBU) In a recent meeting with EST officers, WWF representatives claimed that WWF observers in 2004 had seen evidence of driftnet use on Italian fishing vessels using Sardinian ports. However, they did not say whether they obtained documentary evidence from these sightings, and the Department will note that no such evidence is presented in the WWF letter. WWF contacted the Embassy on an urgent basis because the driftnet season begins in mid-April. END COMMENT.

17. (SBU) On March 3, SCICouns presented Ref A demarche to Riccardo Rigillo, Director for External Resources and Surveillance, Directorate General for Fishing and Aquaculture, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. We mentioned our ongoing concern over the continued use of Italian illegal driftnets and noted that both WWF and Greenpeace-Italy had approached the Embassy last summer. Several articles, some during last July's meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Sorrento, appeared in the Italian press on the problem. Rigillo was aware of the episodes during the summer of 2004, and told us "if similar incidents happen this year, the GOI would take more decisive actions." (NOTE: Rigillo was referring to specific driftnet enforcement plans that have not been activated since 2003. END NOTE.)

ACTION REQUESTED

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18. (SBU) On the potential for driftnet use in Italy this year, Embassy suggests that a letter from OES/O DAS David Balton to Under Secretary Paolo Scarpa Bonazza Buora of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests would be useful to underscore U.S. concerns. Scarpa Bonazza, the chief GOI policymaker on fisheries issues, a close friend of the United States, should be receptive.

19. (SBU) Department is also asked to review faxed letter and advise how Embassy should respond to the WWF Mediterranean Programme Office letter. Assistance appreciated.

SEMBLER

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